AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application, and are marked to show changes.

What is claimed is:

1.   (Currently Amended). A method of ~~dynamically~~ identifying a subset of ~~a set of~~ a larger population of decision objects for which each of a plurality of selectors has a preference, ~~items for which a plurality of selectors have a similar affinity, each of the items having a combination of attributes,~~ the method comprising the steps of:

   (a)   presenting, over an electronic network, to each of the plurality ~~for display to each of a group~~ of selectors ~~a subset of~~ a first group of decision objects selected from the larger ~~set~~ population of decision objects; ~~items, each of the first group of items having a particular combination of attributes;~~

   (b)   capturing data indicative of an expressed ~~item~~ preference ~~expressed~~ for a subset of the presented decision objects ~~items~~ by at least ~~some of the~~ one group of selectors;

   (c)   using the captured data in a selection~~ng~~ process to select a second group of decision objects; and ~~items responsive to the captured data;~~

   (d)   repeating steps (a) through (c), using ~~identifying a subset of~~ the second group of step (c) as the first group of step (a), until a stopping condition is met. ~~items having similarity among respective attributes.~~

2.   (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 wherein each decision object comprises a particular combination of attributes.~~further comprising the step of iterating steps (a) - (d) until a stopping condition is met.~~

3.   (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of identifying a subset of the group of selectors having similarity among expressed decision object ~~item~~ preferences.

4.   (Cancelled).

5.   (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises capturing data indicative of relative ~~item~~ decision object preference expressed for a subset of the presented ~~items~~ decision objects by at least some of the group of selectors.

6. (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises capturing data indicative of a rating assigned to at least some of the presented decision objects ~~items~~ by at least some of the group of selectors.

7. (Original). The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of normalizing the captured data from each selector.

8. (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 wherein step (c) comprises ~~selecting a second group of items responsive to the~~ using the captured data to select a second group of decision objects using ~~an~~ genetic or evolutionary computation algorithm.

9. (Currently Amended). The method~~s~~ of claim 1 wherein step (a) comprises presenting for display to a group of selectors a first group of ~~items~~decision objects, each ~~item~~decision object having a set of merit attributes and a set of reproduction attributes.

10. (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of determining, for each of the first group of ~~items~~decision objects, a fitness score responsive to the captured data for that ~~item~~decision object and the reproduction attributes of that ~~item~~decision object.

11. (Cancelled).

12. (Currently Amended). The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of selecting at least one of the first group of ~~items~~decision objects as a reproduction parent~~s~~ using a fitness-proportionate algorithm.

13. (Currently Amended). The method of claim ~~12~~8 wherein at least one ~~the~~ reproduction parent~~s are~~is selected using a roulette wheel algorithm.

14. (Currently Amended). The method of claim ~~12~~8 wherein at least one ~~the~~ reproduction parent~~s are~~is selected using a Stochastic Universal Sampling algorithm.

15. (Currently Amended). The method of claim ~~12~~9 further comprising the step of selecting a mate for each decision object comprising a reproduction parent in response~~ive~~ to the reproduction attributes of the mate and the reproduction parent.

16. (Currently Amended). The method of claim ~~15~~9 wherein step (c) comprises selecting new ~~items~~decision objects by applying a recombination operator to the merit attributes, the reproduction attributes, or both of a respective decision object mate-reproduction parent pair.

17. (Original). The method of claim 16 wherein the recombination operator is a crossover operator.

18.   (Currently Amended). The method of claim 1 wherein the data indicative of an expressed preference comprises data indicative of a preference as between a presented decision object and a pre-existing decision object, a decision object preferred by consumers, a decision object popular with consumers, a decision object disliked by consumers or a decision object unpopular with consumers. ~~The method of claim 16 further comprising the step of determining, for each one of the second group of items, a plurality of reproduction similarity factors, each of the plurality of reproduction similarity factors representing the similarity between the reproduction attributes of the one item and each other of the second group of items.~~

19.   (Currently Amended). The method of claim 9 wherein step (c) comprises selecting new decision objects by applying a mutation operator to the merit attributes, the reproduction attributes, or both, of a decision object. ~~The method of claim 18 wherein step (d) comprises identifying a subset of the second group of items, each one of the items having, with respect to each other item of the subset, a reproduction similarity factor less than a predetermined threshold.~~

20.   (Cancelled).

21. – 117.   (Cancelled).

118.   (New). The method of claim 1, wherein step (b) further comprises using the captured data to evolve the population of objects.

119.   (New). The method of claim 118, wherein the population of objects is evolved through the use of an evolutionary algorithm.

120.   (New). The method of claim1, wherein each selector is presented with a different first group of decision objects.

121.   (New). The method of claim1, wherein the reproduction attributes are not visibly presented to the selectors.

122.   (New). A method of determining which individual or group of a number of decision objects is preferred by a plurality of selectors, the method comprising the steps of:

a) presenting, over an electronic network, to a selector a set of decision objects;

b) enabling the selector to express a preference for a subset of the presented decision objects;

c) capturing data indicative of the preferences expressed by the selector;

d) inputting the data into a computer program for generating a derived set of decision objects, which generation is influenced by the captured data;

e) presenting to the selector at least a portion of said derived group of decision objects; and

f) repeating steps b) through e) until a stopping criterion is met.

123. (New). The method of claim 122 wherein the derived set of decision objects is generated through an evolutionary process.

124. (New). The method of claim 123, wherein the evolutionary process comprises the use of a genetic or evolutionary computational algorithm.

125. (New). The method of claim 122 wherein the selector comprises a group of persons, a proxy for a person such as a machine learning system, neural net, statistical model, or expert system, or a combination thereof.

126. (New). The method of claim 122 comprising the additional step of effecting a sale to the selector or a subset thereof of a product based on a selected decision object.

127. (New). The method of claim 122 wherein a product based on the selected decision object is produced for delivery to the selector or a subset thereof after the stopping criterion is met.

128. (New). The method of claim 127 wherein the product based on the selected decision object is in existence before the stopping criterion is met.

129. (New). The method of claim 122 comprising the additional step of producing a plurality of units of a selected decision object.

130. (New). The method of claim 122 wherein generating a derived set of decision objects comprises selecting a derived group of decision objects using generative grammars or a generator of random attributes.

131. (New). The method of claim 122, wherein the program generates a derived group of decision objects through the use of a random attribute variation operation.

132. (New). The method of claim 122 wherein the program selects from a set of decision object attributes to generate at least a portion of said derived set of decision objects.

133. (New). The method of claim 122 comprising the additional step, prior to step e), of deleting a generated decision object from or reintroducing a previously introduced decision object to a said derived group of decision objects.

134.   (New). The method of claim 122 wherein the decision object is a good, service, menu, or plan.

135.   (New). The method of claim 122 comprising the additional step of permitting the selector to specify that an attribute of said decision object is favored so as to enrich said derived decision objects with said favored attributes.

136.   (New). The method of claim 122 comprising the additional step of permitting the selector to specify that an attribute of said decision object is disfavored so as to reduce the incidence of said derived decision objects said disfavored attributes.

137.   (New). The method of claim 122 wherein the stopping criterion is:

g) a purchase decision made by the selector or a subset thereof;

h) the cycling of a predetermined number of iterations of steps b) – e);

i) the reaching of a consensus agreement on attributes by a plurality of persons comprising the selector;

j) the reaching of a predetermined number of individual assessments by persons comprising the selector;

k) the passage of a predetermined duration of the method;

l) the intervention of a supervisor;

m) the arrival of a predetermined point in time;

n) the lack of improvement in emerging decision objects as judged by a person comprising the selector;

o) the lack of improvement in emerging decision objects as judged by a supervisor;

p) the lack of improvement in emerging decision objects as judged by a computer program or subroutine that uses as its input data indicative of the preferences expressed by the selector;

q) the identification of distinct preferences among subsets of the selector for different attributes or combinations of attributes;

r) the selection of a specific decision object by a person comprising the selector;

s) lack of dissimilarity among subsets of the emergent decision objects; or

t) a combination thereof.

138.   (New). The method of claim 122 wherein each decision object comprises a particular combination of attributes.

139.   (New). Software operable on a computer system for determining which of a large number of decision objects is preferred by a plurality of selectors, comprising:

      code for presenting on a terminal to each of the plurality of selectors a group of decision objects;

      code for enabling each selector to log data on the terminal indicative of the selector's preferences for a subset of the presented decision objects;

      code for transmitting the data from the terminal to a central computer over a network;

      code, executable by the central computer, for creating a derived group of decision objects, the creation of which is influenced by the data received from the selectors; and

      code for presenting to each of the plurality of selectors at least one derived group of decision objects.

140.   (New). The software of claim 139 wherein the data indicative of preferences comprises data indicative of preference as between a presented decision object and a pre-existing decision object, a decision object preferred by consumers, a decision object popular with consumers, a decision object disliked by consumers or a decision object unpopular with consumers.

141.   (New). The software of claim 139 wherein the data indicative of preferences includes data indicative of the confidence of each selector in his preference expression.

142.   (New). The software of claim 141 wherein the data indicative of the confidence of a selector is used in the regulation of a strategy of generation of derived decision objects or a path of convergence to a preferred decision object.

143.   (New). The software of claim 139 wherein each decision object comprises a particular combination of attributes.

144.   (New). The software of claim 139 wherein the central computer creates a derived group of decision objects through the use of a genetic or evolutionary computational algorithm.